

1797

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S U B S T A N C E

OF THE

S P E E C H

OF THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

CHARLES JAMES FOX,

ON

*Mr. Grey's Motion in the House of Commons,*

FRIDAY, MAY 26, 1797,

*For Leave to bring in a Bill to amend and regulate the Election of  
Members to serve in the Commons House of Parliament;*

AS REPORTED IN

THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

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SECOND EDITION.

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## S P E E C H, &c.

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SIR,

**M**UCH and often as this question has been discussed both within these walls and without, and late as the hour is, I feel it my duty to make some observations, and to deliver my opinion on a measure of high importance at all times, but which, at the present period, is become infinitely more interesting than ever. I fear, however, that my conviction on this subject is not common to the House: I fear that we are not likely to be agreed as to the importance of the measure, nor as to the necessity; since, by the manner in which it has been discussed this night, I foresee that, so far from being unanimous on the proposition, we shall not be agreed as to the situation and circumstances of the country itself, much less as to the nature of the measures, which, in my mind, that situation and those circumstances imperiously demand. I cannot suppress my astonishment at the tone and manner of gentlemen on this day. The arguments that have been used would lead the mind to believe that we are in a state of peace and tranquillity; and that our circumstances are flourishing and glorious; that we enjoy the happiness of internal concord, order, and prosperity, which again convey for our foreign relations, strength, security, and respect; and that we have no provocation to any steps to improve the benefits we enjoy, or to retrieve any misfortune that we have incurred. To persons who feel this to be our situation, every proposition tending to meliorate the condition of the country must be subject of jealousy and alarm; and if we really differ so widely in sentiment as to the state of the country, I see no probability of an agreement in any measure that is proposed. For myself, and according to my view of our circumstances, all that part of the argument against reform which relates to the danger of innovation, is strangely misplaced by those who think with me, that, so far from procuring the mere chance of practical benefits by a reform, it is only by a reform that we can have a chance of rescuing ourselves from a state of extreme peril and distress. Such is my view of our situation. I think it so perilous, so imminent, that, though I do not feel conscious of despair, an emotion which the heart ought not to admit, yet it comes nearer to that state of hazard, when the sentiment of despair, rather than of hope, may be supposed to take possession of the mind. I feel myself to be the member of a community in which

the boldest man, without any imputation of cowardice, may dread that we are not merely approaching to a state of extreme peril, but of absolute dissolution; and with this conviction, indelibly impressed upon my heart, gentlemen will not believe that I disregard all the general arguments that have been used against the motion on the score of the danger of innovation, from any disrespect to the Honourable Members who have urged them, or to the ingenuity with which they have been pressed, but because I am firmly persuaded that they are totally inapplicable to the circumstances under which we come to the discussion. With the ideas that I entertain I cannot listen for a moment to suggestions that are applicable only to other situations and to other times; for unless we are resolved, in a helpless pusillanimity, or in a stupid torpor, to succumb, and to wait with resignation the approach of our doom, to lie down and die, we must take bold and decisive measures for our deliverance. We must not be deterred by meaner apprehensions. We must combine all our strength, fortify one another by the communion of our courage; and by a seasonable exertion of national wisdom, patriotism, and vigour, take measures for the chance of salvation, and encounter with unappalled hearts, all the enemies, foreign and internal, all the dangers and calamities of every kind which press so heavily upon us. Such is my view of the present emergency of England; and under this impression, I cannot for a moment listen to the argument of danger arising from innovation, since our ruin is inevitable if we pursue the course which has brought us to the brink of the precipice. But before I enter on the subject of the proposition that has been made to us, I must take notice of an insinuation that has again and again been flung out by gentlemen on the other side of the House, on party feelings, in which they affect to deplore the existence of a spirit injurious to the welfare of the public. I suspect, by the frequent repetition of this insinuation, that they are desirous of making it be believed, or that they understand themselves by the word party feelings, an unprincipled combination of men for the pursuit of office and its emoluments, the eagerness or zeal of which leads them to entertain and to act upon feelings of personal enmity, ill-will, and opposition to his Majesty's Ministers. If such be their interpretation of party feelings, or if the term be so understood by the House, I must say, that I am utterly unconscious of any such feeling, and I am sure that I can speak with confidence for my friends, that they are actuated by no motives of so debasing a nature. But if they understand by party feelings, that men of honour, who entertain similar principles, conceive that those principles may be more beneficially and successfully pursued by the force of mutual support, harmony, and confidential connexion, then I adopt the interpretation, and have no scruple in saying, that it is for the advantage of the country;



an advantage to the cause of truth and the constitution; an advantage to freedom and humanity; an advantage to whatever honourable object they may be engaged in, that men pursue it with the united force of party feelings, that is to say, pursue it with the confidence, zeal, and spirit, which the communion of just confidence is likely to inspire; and if the Honourable Gentlemen apply this description of party feelings to the pursuit in which we are engaged, I am equally ready to say that the disastrous condition of the empire ought to animate and invigorate the union of all those who feel it to be their duty to check and arrest a career that threatens us with such inevitable ruin. For surely those who think that party is a good thing for ordinary occasions, must admit that it is peculiarly so on emergencies like the present; it is peculiarly incumbent upon men who feel the value of united exertion to combine all their strength to extricate the vessel when in danger of being stranded. But gentlemen seem to insinuate that this union of action is directed more against persons than measures, and that allusions ought not to be made to the conduct of particular men. It is not easy to analyse this sort of imputation, for it is not easy to disjoin the measure from its author, nor to examine the origin and progress of any evil without also inquiring into and scrutinising the motives and the conduct of the persons who gave it rise. How, for instance, is it possible for us to enter into the discussion of the particular question now before the House, without a certain mixture of personal allusion? We complain that the representation of the people in Parliament is defective. How does this complaint originate? From the conduct of the majorities in Parliament. Does not this naturally lead us to inquire whether there is not something fundamentally erroneous in election, or something incidentally vicious in the treatment of those majorities? We surely must be permitted to inquire whether the fault and calamity of which we complain is inherent in the nature of the institution, in which nothing personal is to be ascribed to Ministers, as it will operate in a more or less degree in all the circumstances in which we may find ourselves; or whether it is not an occasional abuse of the original institution, applicable only to these times and to these men, in which they are peculiarly guilty, but from which system representation itself ought to stand absolved.

I put the question in this way, in order to shew that a certain degree of personality is inseparable from the discussion, and that gentlemen cannot with justice ascribe to the bitterness of party feelings, what flows out of the principle of free inquiry. Indeed this is a pregnant example of there being nothing peculiarly hostile to persons in this subject; it is not a thing now taken up for the first time, meditated and conceived in particular hostility

to the Right Honourable Gentleman. Be it remembered that he himself has again and again introduced and patronized the same subject, and that on all the occasions on which he has brought it forward it has invariably received my approbation and support. When he brought it forward first in the year 1782, that is, by the bye, in a time of war, and in a time of severe pressure of public calamity, I gave to the proposition of the Honourable Gentleman my feeble support. Again when he brought it forward in the year 1783, at a time when I was in an office high in his Majesty's service, I gave it my support. Again, in the year 1785, when the Right Honourable Gentleman himself was in place, and renewed his proposition, it had my countenance and support. I have invariably declared myself a friend to Parliamentary reform by whomsoever proposed; and though in all the discussions that have heretofore taken place, I have had occasion to express my doubt as to the efficacy of the particular mode, I have never hesitated to say that the principle itself was beneficial, and that though not called for with the urgency which some persons, and among others the Right Honourable Gentleman, declared to exist, I constantly was of opinion that it ought not to be discouraged. Now, however, that all doubt upon the subject is removed by the pressure of our calamities, and that no spark of hope remains for the country, and the dreadful alternative seems to be whether we shall sink into the most abject thralldom on the one side, or continue in the same course until we are driven into the horrors of anarchy on the other, I can have no hesitation in saying that the plan of recurring to the principle of melioration which the constitution points out, is become a desideratum to the people of Great Britain. Between the alternatives of base and degraded slavery on the one side, or of tumultuous, though, probably, short-lived anarchy on the other, though no man would hesitate to make his choice, yet, if there be a course obvious and practicable, which, without either violence or innovation, may lead us back to the vigour we have lost, to the energy that has been stifled, to the independence that has been undermined, and yet preserve every thing in its place, a moment ought not to be lost in embracing the chance which this fortunate provision of the British system has made for British safety.

This is my opinion, and it is not an opinion merely founded upon theory, but upon actual observation of what is passing in the world. I conceive that if we are not resolved to shut our eyes to the instructive lessons of the times, we must be convinced of the propriety of seasonable concession. I see nothing in what is called the lamentable example of France to prove to me that timely acquiescence with the desires of the people is more dangerous than obstinate resistance to their demands; but the situations



situations of Great Britain and France are so essentially different, there is so little in common between the character of England at this day, and the character of France at the commencement of the revolution, that it is impossible to reason upon them from parity of circumstances or of character. It is not necessary for me, I am sure, to enter into any analysis of the essential differences between the character of a people that had been kept for ages in the barbarism of servitude, and a people who have enjoyed for so long a time the light of freedom. But we have no occasion to go to France for example; another country nearer to our hearts, with which we are better acquainted, opens to us a book so legible and clear, that he must be blind indeed who is not able to draw from it warning and instruction; it holds forth a lesson which is intelligible to dulness itself—let us look to the kingdom of Ireland, and see how remarkably the arguments and reasoning of this day tally with the arguments and reasoning that unfortunately prevailed in the sister kingdom, and by which the King's Ministers were fatally able to overpower the voice of reason and patriotism, and stifle all attention to the prayers and application of the people. It is impossible for any coincidence to be more perfect. We are told that there are in England, as it is said that there were in Ireland, a small number of persons desirous of throwing the country into confusion, and of alienating the affections of the people from the established government. Permit me, Mr. Speaker, in passing, to observe that the Right Honourable Chancellor of the Exchequer did not represent my Honourable Friend (Mr. Erskine) quite correctly, when he stated that my Learned Friend admitted the existence of such men. On the contrary, the argument of my Learned Friend was hypothetical; he said, If it be true, as it is so industriously asserted, that such and such men do exist in the country, then surely in wisdom you ought to prevent their number from increasing by timely conciliation of the body of moderate men, who desire only reform. In this opinion I perfectly acquiesce with my Learned Friend. I believe that the number of persons who are discontented with the government of the country, and who desire to overthrow it, is very, very few, indeed. But the Honourable Gentleman says, that the friends of moderate reform are few, and that no advantage is to be gained by conceding to this very small body what will not satisfy the violent, which he contends is more numerous; and he vehemently demands to know whom he is to divide, whom to separate, and what benefit he is to obtain from this surrender? To this I answer, that if there are two such bodies, it is wisdom, it is policy, to prevent the one from falling into the other, by granting to the moderate what is just and reasonable. If the argument of the Right Honourable Gentleman be correct, the necessity for concession is  
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more imperious, it is only by these means that you can check the spirit of profelytism, and prevent a conversion that by and by will be too formidable for you to resist. Mark this, and see how it applies to the precedent of Ireland. In the Report that has been made by the Parliament of that kingdom on the present disorders, it is said, that so long ago as the year 1791, there existed some men in that country, and some societies, who harboured the desire of separation from England, and who wished to set up a republican form of government. The Report does not state what was the precise number of those societies in 1791; it declares, however, that the number was small and insignificant.—From small beginnings, however, they have increased to the alarming number of 100,000 men in the province of Ulster only.—By what means have they so increased, and who have been the converts and profelytes who thus swelled their numbers to so gigantic a size? Obviously the men who had no such desire, no such feelings, no such design originally;—obviously the persons who had no other object in view in all the petitions which they presented, and in all the applications which they made, than Catholic emancipation and reform of Parliament. This is also admitted by the Report. The spirit of reform spread over the country:—they made humble, earnest, and repeated applications to the Castle for redress; but there they found a fixed determination to resist every claim, and a rooted aversion to every thing that bore even the colour of reform. They made their applications to all the eminent and considerable characters in the country, who had on former occasions distinguished themselves by exertions in the popular cause; and of these justly eminent men I desire to speak as I feel, with the utmost respect for their talents and virtues, and for the warm interest which they take in the welfare of the country. But, unfortunately, they were so alarmed by the French revolution, and by the cry which had been so artfully set up by Ministers of the danger of infection, that they could not listen to the complaint.—What was the consequence? These bodies of men, who found it in vain to expect it from the Government, at the Castle, or from the Parliament, and having no where else to recur to for redress, joined the societies, whom the Report accuses of cherishing the desire of separation from England; and they imbibed and became converts to all those notions of extravagant and frantic ambition, which the Report lays to their charge, and which threatens consequences so dreadful and alarming, that no man can contemplate them without horror and dismay.

What, then, is the lesson to be derived from this example, but that the comparatively small societies of 1791 became strong and formidable by the accession of the many who had nothing in common with them in the outset? I wish it were possible for us to draw the line more accurately between the small number that  
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the Report describes to have had mischievous objects originally in view, and the numerous bodies who were made converts by the neglect of their petition for constitutional rights. Is it improbable that the original few were not more than ten or twenty thousand in number? What, then, do I learn from this? That the unwise, impolitic, and unjust refusal of Government, to attend to the applications of the moderate, made eighty or ninety thousand profelytes from moderation to violence. This is the lesson which the book of Ireland exhibits. Can you refuse your assent to the moral? Will any man argue, that if reform had been conceded to the eighty or ninety thousand moderate petitioners, you would have this day to deplore the union of one hundred thousand men, bent on objects so extensive, so alarming, so calamitous? I wish to warn you by this example. Every argument that you have heard used to-day was used in Dublin. In the short-sighted pride and obstinacy of the Government, they turned a deaf ear to the suppliant; they have now, perhaps, in the open field to brave the assertor. Unwarned, untutored by example, are you still to go on with the same contemptuous and stubborn pride? I by no means think that Great Britain is at this moment in the situation, or that it presents the aspect of Ireland. I by no means think that the discontents of this country have risen to a such height as to make us fear for the general peace of the country; but I deprecate the course which was pursued in Ireland. What England is now, Ireland was in 1791. What was said of the few, they have now applied to the many; and as there are discontents in this country, which we can neither dissemble nor conceal, let us not, by an unwise and criminal disdain, irritate and fret them into violence and disorder. The discontents may happily subside; but a man must be either sanguine indeed in his temper, or dull in his intellect, if he would leave to the operation of chance what he might more certainly obtain by the exercise of reason. Every thing that is dear and urgent to the minds of Englishmen presses upon us; in the critical moment at which I now address you, a day, an hour, ought not to elapse, without giving to ourselves the chance of this recovery. When Government is daily presenting itself in the shape of weakness that borders on dissolution—unequal to all the functions of useful strength, and formidable only in pernicious corruption—weak in power, and strong only in influence; am I to be told that such a state of things can go on with safety to any branch of the constitution? If men think that, under the impression of such a system, we can go on without a material recurrence to first principles, they argue in direct opposition to all theory and to all practice. These discontents cannot, in their nature, subside under detected weakness and exposed incapacity. In their progress and increase, as increase they must, who shall say that direction can be given to the

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torrent, or that, having broken its bounds, it can be kept from overwhelming the country? Sir, it is not the part of statesmen, it is not the part of rational beings, to amuse ourselves with such fallacious dreams; we must not sit down and lament over our hapless situation; we must not deliver ourselves up to an imbecile despondency that would animate the approach of danger; but by a seasonable, alert, and vigorous measure of wisdom, meet it with, what we think, a sufficient and a seasonable remedy.—We may be disappointed—we may fail in the application, for no man can be certain of his footing on ground that is unexplored; but we shall at least have a chance for success—we shall at least do what belongs to legislators, and to rational beings on the occasion, and I have confidence that our efforts would not be in vain. I say that we should give ourselves a chance, and, I may add, the best chance for deliverance; since it would exhibit to the country a proof that we had conquered the first great difficulty that stood in the way of bettering our condition—We had conquered ourselves. We had given a generous triumph to reason over prejudice, we had given a death-blow to those miserable distinctions of *Whig* and *Tory*, under which the warfare had been maintained between pride and privilege; and through the contention of our rival jealousies, the genuine rights of the many had been gradually undermined, and frittered away. I say, that this would be giving us the best chance, because, seeing every thing go on from bad to worse—seeing the progress of the most scandalous waste countenanced by the most criminal confidence, and that the effrontery of corruption no longer requires the mask of concealment—seeing liberty daily infringed, and the vital springs of the nation insufficient for the extravagance of a dissipated government, I must believe, that, unless the people are mad or stupid, they will suspect that there is something fundamentally false or vicious in our system, and which no reform would be equal to correct. Then, to prevent all this, and to try if we can effect a reform without touching the main pillars of the constitution—without changing its forms, or disturbing the harmony of its parts—without putting any thing out of its place, or affecting the securities which we justly hold to be so sacred, I say, that it is the only chance which we have for retrieving our misfortunes by the road of quiet and tranquillity, and by which national strength may be recovered without disturbing the property of a single individual. It has been said, that the House possesses the confidence of the country as much as ever. This, in truth, is as much as to say, that his Majesty's Ministers possess the confidence of the country in the same degree as ever, since the majority of the House support and applaud the measures of the Government, and give their countenance to all the evils which we are doomed to endure. I was very much surprised to hear any proposition so unaccountable advanced by any person connected with Ministers, particularly



particularly as the noble Lord had, but a sentence or two before acknowledged that there had been, to be sure, a number of petitions presented to his Majesty for the dismissal of his Ministers. The one assertion is utterly incompatible with the other, unless he means to assert, that the petitions which have been presented to the Throne are of no importance. The noble Lord can hardly, I think, speak in this contemptuous manner of the petitions of Middlesex, London, Westminster, Surry, Hampshire, York, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and many other places, unless the noble Lord means to insinuate that they are proofs only of our very great industry, and that they are not the genuine sense of the districts from which they come. If the noble Lord ascribes them to our industry, he gives us credit for much more merit of that kind than we are entitled to; it certainly is not the peculiar characteristic of the present Opposition, that they are very industrious in agitating the public mind. But grant to the noble Lord his position—be it to our industry that all these petitions are to be ascribed. If industry could procure them, was it our moderation, our good will and forbearance, that has made us for fourteen years relax from this industry, and never bring forward these petitions until now? No, Sir, it is not to our industry that they are to be ascribed now, nor to our forbearance that they did not come before. He will not give us credit for this forbearance; and the consequence is, that he must own, upon his imputation of industry, that the present is the first time when we were sure of the people, and that these petitions are a proof that at length the confidence of the people in Ministers is shaken. That it is so, it is in vain for the noble Lord, or for any other friend of those Ministers, to contend. They, who in former times were eager to shew their confidence by addresses, have now been as eager to express their disapprobation in petitions for their removal. How, then, can we say that the confidence of the people is not shaken? Is confidence to be always against the people, and never for it? It is a notable argument, that because we do not find, at the general election, very material changes in the representation, the sentiments of the people continue the same, in favour of the war, and in favour of his Majesty's Ministers. The very ground of the present discussion gives the answer to this argument. Why do we agitate the question of Parliamentary Reform? Why, but because a general election does not afford to the people the means of expressing their voice; because this House is not a sufficient representative of the people? Gentlemen are fond of arguing in this circle. When we contend that Ministers have not the confidence of the people, they tell us that Parliament is the faithful representative of the sense of the country. When we assert that the representation is defective, and shew, from the petitions to the Throne, that the House does not speak the voice

of the people, they turn to the general election, and say, at this period they had an opportunity of choosing faithful organs of their opinion; and because very little or no change has taken place in the representation, the sense of the people must be the same. Sir, it is in vain for gentlemen to shelter themselves in this mode of reasoning. We assert, that under the present form and practice of elections, we cannot expect to see any remarkable change produced by a general election. We must argue from experience. Let us look back to the period of the American war. It will not be denied by the Right Honourable Gentleman, that towards the end of that war, it became extremely unpopular, and that the King's Ministers lost the confidence of the nation. In the year 1780 a dissolution took place, and then it was naturally imagined by superficial observers, who did not examine the real state of representation, that the people would have returned a Parliament that would have unequivocally spoken their sentiments on the occasion. What was the case? I am able to speak with considerable precision. At that time I was much more than I am at present in the way of knowing personally the individuals returned, and of making an accurate estimate of the accession gained to the popular side by that election. I can take upon me to say, that the change was very small indeed: not more than three or four persons were added to the number of those who had from the beginning opposed the disastrous career of the Ministers in that war. I remember that, upon that occasion, Lord North made use of precisely the same argument as is now brought forward: "What!" said he, "can you contend the war is unpopular, after the declaration in its favour that the people have made by their choice of representatives? The general election is the proof that the war continues to be the war of the people of England." Such was the argument of Lord North, and yet it was notoriously otherwise; so notoriously otherwise, that the Right Honourable Gentleman, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, made a just and striking use of it, to demonstrate the necessity of a parliamentary reform. He referred to this event as to a demonstration of this doctrine. "You see," said he, "that so defective, so inadequate, is the present practice, at least of the elective franchise, that no impression of national calamity, no conviction of ministerial error, no abhorrence of disastrous war, is sufficient to stand against that corrupt influence which has mixed itself with election, and which drowns and stifles the popular voice." Upon this statement, and upon this unanswerable argument, the Right Honourable Gentleman acted in 1782—When he proposed a parliamentary reform, he did it expressly on the ground of the experience of 1780, and he made an explicit declaration, that we had no other security by which to guard ourselves against the return of the same evils. He repeated this warning  
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in 1783 and in 1785. It was the leading principle of his conduct, "Without a reform," said he, "the nation cannot be safe; this war may be put an end to, but what will protect you against another? as certainly as the spirit which engendered the present war actuates the secret councils of the Crown, will you, under the influence of a defective representation, be involved again in new wars, and in similar calamities."

This was his argument in 1782, this was his prophecy, and the Right Honourable Gentleman was a true prophet. Precisely as he pronounced it, the event happened; another war took place, and I am sure it will not be considered as an aggravation of its character, that it is at least equal in disaster to the war of which the Right Honourable Gentleman complained. "The defect of representation," he said, "is the national disease; and unless you apply a remedy directly to that disease, you must inevitably take the consequences with which it is pregnant." With such an authority, can any man deny that I reason right? Did not the Right Honourable Gentleman demonstrate his case? Good God! what a fate is that of the Right Honourable Gentleman, and in what a state of whimsical contradiction does he stand! During the whole course of his administration, and particularly during the course of the present war, every prediction that he has made, every hope that he has held out, every prophecy that he has hazarded, has failed; he has disappointed the expectations that he has raised; and every promise that he has given, has proved to be a fallacy and a phantom. Yet, for these very declarations, and notwithstanding these failures, we have called him a wise Minister. We have given him our confidence on account of his predictions, and have continued it upon their failure. Though no one event which he foretold has been verified, we have continued to behold him as the oracle of wisdom! But in the only instance in which he really predicted, as if by divine inspiration, what has come to pass, in that we have treated him with stubborn incredulity! In 1785, he pronounced the awful prophecy, "Without a parliamentary reform the nation will be plunged into new wars; without a parliamentary reform you cannot be safe against bad ministers, nor can even good ministers be of use to you." Such was his prediction! and it has come upon us. It would seem as if the whole life of the Right Honourable Gentleman, from that period, had been destined by Providence for the illustration of his warning. If I were disposed to consider him as a real enthusiast, and a bigot in divination, we might be apt to think that he had himself taken measures for the verification of his prophecy. He might now exclaim to us, with the proud fervour of success, "You see the consequence of not listening to the Oracle! I told you what would happen; it is true that your destruction is complete; I have plunged you into a new war; I have

“ I have exhausted you as a people ; I have brought you to the  
 “ brink of ruin, but I told you beforehand what would happen ;  
 “ I told you, that without a reform in the representation of the  
 “ people, no minister, however wise, could save you ; you denied  
 “ me my means, and you take the consequence !” I say, Sir,  
 that if I were to consider him as a bigot to his doctrine, or that  
 his mind was tinctured with superstition, as we have heard of en-  
 thusiasts whose lives have been devoted to the fulfilment of their  
 own predictions, the Right Honourable Gentleman’s administra-  
 tion has been shaped, and his measures framed, for bringing into a  
 terrible demonstration the political doctrine with which he com-  
 menced his career.

But a reform in the representation of the people, say gentle-  
 men on the opposite side of the House, is not called for by the  
 country ; and though meetings have been held in various parts of  
 the kingdom, and petitions have come up for the dismissal of Mi-  
 nisters, they have not expressed a wish for reform. In answer to  
 this argument it is only necessary to observe, that the restrictions  
 which have been recently laid on meetings of the people, and on  
 popular discussion, may serve to account for the question of reform  
 not being mixed with that which was the subject of their immediate  
 consideration. The purpose of the meeting is necessarily specified  
 in the requisition to the sheriff ; and if any other business was at-  
 tempted to be brought forward, the sheriff would have the power  
 of dispersing the meeting. This has actually been experienced ;  
 for, at a meeting of a very respectable county in Ireland, the  
 county of Antrim, after the immediate business for which they  
 were assembled was transacted, that of a petition for the dismissal  
 of his Majesty’s Ministers, and of Catholic emancipation and re-  
 form, a motion was made for thanks to Earl Moira and myself,  
 on account of the steps that we had taken to turn the attention  
 of Government to the critical state of that kingdom ; a pretty une-  
 quivocal proof that the freeholders of that great and respectable  
 county did not consider our proceedings as an interference with the  
 independent legislature of the sister kingdom. But what was the  
 conduct of the sheriff on the occasion ? I do not at all complain  
 of it as wrong, because I think that business ought always to be  
 previously announced, but it serves to shew the power of the sheriff  
 in such case. The sheriff declared that he could not put the  
 question, though he had personally no objection to it, because it  
 did not make a part of the business mentioned in the requisition.  
 Now, Sir, this is only an example to prove, that, however well  
 disposed to parliamentary reform, the people could not with pro-  
 priety introduce the matter into the petitions agreed upon by meet-  
 ings called for a different purpose. Their silence upon the subject  
 is no proof either way. The Honourable Gentleman will not pro-  
 phesy, that because petitions have not come up, petitions will not  
 come.



come. It was, perhaps, a prudent resolution to think of one subject only at a time; perhaps they thought that the surest, if not the only way to accomplish a reform in the representation, was to procure the removal of those Ministers who had abandoned the measure. But granting even the fact, that the country does not now call for this reform—a fact which, however, I deny—is the country in such a situation as to make it improbable that the universal demand of a parliamentary reform, which has burst from the people of Ireland, will not be speedily communicated by sympathy to the people of England? When I see that the treatment which the people of Ireland have received upon this subject, has exasperated their minds to such a degree as to throw the whole of that kingdom into confusion, and that we have daily to dread the danger of actual insurrection, shall I not take measures to prevent the rise of a passion that may swell into equal tumult? The nearness of the two countries, the sympathetic interest, the similarity of language, of constitution, and almost of suffering, make it probable that the one nation will catch the disease of the other, unless we interpose a seasonable cure, or rather preventive of the malady. Is it not desirable, in a moment of such agitation, and on the eve of such a crisis as we are likely to encounter? It is wisdom, it is prudence, to erect a standard around which all the patriotism and the moderation of the kingdom may rally, and the Government may be strengthened against the violence of the few by the countenance and support of the many. If it be true, as we have been taught to believe by our ancestors, that that government is the strongest whose basis is the broadest, it must be conceded to me, that a prudent extension of the representative system is a salutary mean of widening the foundations of the fabric of the British government. The Right Honourable Gentleman speaks of the strength of Government. What symptom of strength does it exhibit? Is it the cordiality of all the branches of the national force? Is it the harmony that happily reigns in all the departments of the executive power? Is it the reciprocal affection that subsists between the Government and the people? Is it in the energy with which the people are eager and alert to carry into execution the measures of the Administration, from the heart-felt conviction that they are founded in wisdom, favourable to their own freedom, and calculated for national happiness? Is it because our resources are flourishing and untouched, because our vigour is undiminished, because our spirit is animated by success, and our courage by our glory? Is it because Government have in a perilous situation, when they have been obliged to call upon the country for sacrifices, shewn a conciliating tenderness and regard for the rights of the people, as well as a marked disinterestedness and forbearance on their own parts, by which they have, in an exemplary manner, made their own æconomy

nomy to keep pace with the increased demands for the public service; and have they by these means secured to the Government the confidence, the affection, the generosity, and the spirit of the people? Are these the sources of the strength of Government? I forbear, Sir, to push the inquiry; I forbear to allude more particularly to symptoms which no man can contemplate at this moment without grief and dismay. It is not the declarations of Right Honourable Gentlemen that constitute the strength of a government. You may deceive yourselves by lofty and vain language, but you yourselves will be the only dupes. That government alone is strong that has the hearts of the people; and will any man contend that we should not be more likely to add strength to the state, if we were to extend the basis of the popular representation? Would not a House of Commons, freely elected, and that was in truth the representative of the people, in supporting the administration of the crown, be more likely to conciliate and to insure the support of the people? If this be true in the abstract, it is certainly our peculiar duty to look for this support in the hour of difficulty. What man who foresees a hurricane is not desirous of strengthening his house? If he conceives it to be incapable of standing the storm, he fortifies it by buttresses, and takes every precaution which prudence and foresight can suggest. Shall nations alone be blind to the dictates of reason, and sit supine on the approach of the tempest? Let us not, Sir, be deterred from this act of prudence by the false representations that are made to us, or the false deductions that are drawn from the recent occurrences of the world. I do not care for misrepresentation, and I do not scruple to give my opinion on those occurrences with freedom. France is the phantom that is constantly held out to terrify us from our purpose. Look at France; it will not be denied but that she stands on the broad basis of free representation. Whatever other views the government of France may exhibit, and which may afford just alarm to other nations, it cannot be denied that her representative system has proved itself capable of vigorous exertion. It cannot be denied but that it has given her in truth gigantic strength. We feel it too sensibly, Europe feels it too sensibly, for denial.

Now, Sir, though I do not wish you to imitate France, and though I am persuaded you have no necessity for any terror of such imitation being forced upon you, yet I say that you ought to take example of what is good in it. I say, that you ought to be as ready to adopt the virtues, as you are steady in averting from the country the vices, of France. I say, that if it is demonstrated beyond the power of subterfuge to question, that genuine representation alone can give solid power, and that in order to make government strong, the people must make the government, I say, that you ought to act on this grand maxim of political wisdom



dom thus demonstrated, and call in the people according to their original principles of your system to the strength of your government. I say that in doing this you will not innovate, you will not imitate, you will only recur to the true path of the constitution of England. In making the people of England a constituent part of the government of England, you do no more than restore the genuine edifice designed and framed by our ancestors. An Honourable Baronet spoke of the instability of democracies, and says that history does not give us the example of one that has lasted eighty years. Sir, I am not speaking of pure democracies, and therefore his allusion does not apply to my argument. Eighty years however of peace and repose would be pretty well for any people to enjoy, and would be no bad recommendation of a pure democracy. I am very ready, however, to agree with the Honourable Baronet, that, according to the experience of history, the ancient democracies of the world were vicious and objectionable on many accounts; their instability, their injustice, and many other vices, cannot be overlooked; but, surely, when we turn to the ancient democracies of Greece, when we see them in all the splendour of the arts and of arms, when we see how they aroused and invigorated genius, and to what an elevation they carried the powers of man, it cannot be denied that however vicious on the score of ingratitude, of injustice, they were at least the pregnant and never-failing source of national strength, and that in particular they brought forth and afforded this strength in a peculiar manner in the moment of difficulty and distress. When we look at the democracies of the ancient world, we are compelled to acknowledge their oppressions to their dependencies, their horrible acts of injustice and of ingratitude to their own citizens; but they compel us also to admiration by their vigour, their constancy, their spirit, and their exertions in every great emergency in which they are called upon to act. We are compelled to own that it gives a power, of which no other form of government is capable. Why? Because it incorporates every man with the state, because it arouses every thing that belongs to the soul as well as to the body of man. Because it makes every individual creature feel that he is fighting for himself and not for another; that it is his own cause, his own safety, his own concern, his own dignity on the face of the earth, and his own interest on the identical soil which he has to maintain; and accordingly we find that whatever may be ascribed, that whatever may be objected to them on account of the turbulence of the passions which they engender, their short duration, and their disgusting vices, they have exacted from the common suffrage of mankind the palm of strength and vigour. Who that reads the history of the Persian war—what boy, whose heart is warmed by the grand and sublime actions which the democratic

spirit produced, does not find in this principle the key to all the wonders which were achieved at Thermopylæ and elsewhere, and of which the recent and marvellous acts of the French people are pregnant examples? He sees that the principle of liberty only could create the sublime and irresistible emotion; and it is in vain to deny, from the striking illustration that our own times have given, that the principle is eternal, and that it belongs to the heart of man. Shall we then refuse to take the benefit of this invigorating principle? Shall we refuse to take the benefit which the wisdom of our ancestors resolved that it should confer on the British constitution? With the knowledge that it can be reinfused into our system without violence, without disturbing any one of its parts, are we become so inert, so terrified, or so stupid, as to hesitate for one hour to restore ourselves to the health which it would be sure to give? When we see the giant power that it confers upon others, we ought not to withhold it from Great Britain. How long is it since we were told in this House that France was a blank in the map of Europe, and that she lay an easy prey to any power that might be disposed to divide and plunder her? Yet we see that by the mere force and spirit of this principle, France has brought all Europe to her feet. Without disguising the vices of France, without overlooking the horrors that have been committed, and that have tarnished the glory of the revolution, it cannot be denied that they have exemplified the doctrine, that if you wish for power you must look to liberty. If ever there was a moment when this maxim ought to be dear to us, it is the present. We have tried all other means, we have had recourse to every stratagem that artifice, that influence, that cunning could suggest; we have addressed ourselves to all the base passions of the nation; we have addressed ourselves to pride, to avarice, to fear; we have awakened all the interested emotions; we have employed every thing that flattery, every thing that address, every thing that privilege could effect; we have tried to terrify them into exertion, and all has been unequal to our emergency. Let us try them by the only means which experience demonstrates to be invincible—let us address ourselves to their love—let us identify them with ourselves—let us make it their own cause as well as our's! To induce them to come forward in support of the state, let us make them a part of the state, and this they become the very instant you give them a House of Commons, that is the faithful organ of their will; then, Sir, when you have made them believe and feel that there can be but one interest in the country, you will never call upon them in vain for exertion. Can this be the case as the House of Commons is now constituted? Can they think so if they review the administration of the Right Honourable Gentleman, every part of which must convince them that the present represent-



ation is a mockery and a shadow? I shall not trouble you, Sir, with going over the whole of that series of disastrous measures that have forced upon the country the impression that the House of Commons has lost its efficacy in the system of government. But let us look back to the very singular circumstances under which the Right Honourable Gentleman came into power: from this we shall see in what estimation the House of Commons is held, even by Government itself, when it does not suit their purpose to extol it as the representative of the people. The Honourable Gentleman came into power against the sense of the majority of the then House of Commons; and armed with all the corrupt power of the Crown, he stood, and successfully resisted the power of the House of Commons. He declared that it was not the representative of the people, that it did not speak the sense of the nation, and he derided its weakness and inefficiency. What is the doctrine that this conduct in 1784 promulgated? That the House of Commons, so long as it obeys the will of the Minister, so long as it grants every thing which he demands, so long as it supports every measure which he brings forward, is the genuine representative of the country—so long it is powerful and omnipotent—but the moment that a House of Commons presumes to be the censor of Government—the moment that it assumes the character of diffidence and opposition, from that instant it ceases to have power or authority in the kingdom—it then becomes a straw which the Minister can puff away with a breath: this he did, and completed his triumph! Since that time who will say that the corrupt influence of the Crown has not made enormous strides in destroying the power of election? Since that time four-fifths of the election franchises of Scotland, and Cornwall particularly, have passed into the hands of Government, and the prediction which an Honourable Gentleman (Mr. Burke) then made upon the occasion has been literally fulfilled—no House of Commons has been since found strong enough to oppose the Ministers of the Crown. It has been said that that period was not proper to be taken as a test of the public spirit on the subject of representation; that it was a moment of national prosperity, and that nothing can be decided for or against representation by that precedent. It was, however, in that moment that the seeds of rottenness and dissolution were sown. I thought I saw them at the time, and I have been confirmed in my observation by every thing that has occurred since. I pass over all the period between that time up to the present war, not because it is not fruitful of examples, but because I do not wish to trespass upon your time. The present war, say Ministers, was popular in its commencement; the same was said of the commencement of the American war. I will not stop to inquire into the truth of the assertion, though it is at least doubtful; I will not deny that, through the

artful machinations of Government, a clamour was excited of the interested, which Ministers called the voice of the nation. Whatever may have been the case, however, in the outset of the two wars, the progress in the public opinion has been the same in both: and I aver, that as in the American war the public opinion had changed, though no change was produced by the general election of 1780; so now I aver that, for the last two years, the present war has been universally unpopular in England, though it has not made its voice to be heard by the choice of representatives. Though the general election has not produced a change of men, yet he must be a dull observer of the public mind who says, that the general election did not afford a striking proof of a change in the sentiments of the people; for what was the conduct of the candidates in populous places on the two sides? We boasted of having opposed the war; we made it our claim, and our appeal to the confidence of the people, that we had resisted every one of the measures by which the Government has brought us into our present condition. What was the conduct of the candidates on the other side? It consisted of apologies for their past offence of supporting the war; it consisted of whining and canting explanations, in descriptions of alarms, and not unfrequently in misrepresentations of facts. Such was the feeling conveyed by the general election: it served to convince every observing man, that if the representative system had been perfect, or the practice pure, the new Parliament would have decidedly voted against the continuance of the war. Seeing then the conduct they have pursued, can the people have confidence in this House? Can they have confidence in a House that has given their countenance to misrepresentation through the whole course of the war? Suppose the people were to look for the history of the events that have happened in this war, and for the condition of the country to the King's speeches from the throne, and to the addresses of the two Houses of Parliament; they would see that almost in every instance his Majesty has declared from the throne, and the House of Commons has replied in its humble and loyal addresses, that our prospects were improved, and that the country was flourishing and prosperous. Look at all the King's speeches and addresses since the year 1793, and you will find that this is their general tone and language. And yet this is the House of Commons in which the people of England are to have confidence! Amidst all the failures and sufferings which they have had to deplore, and in their present condition of dreadful and unparalleled calamity, they are called upon to trust to a House of Commons, that assures them their prospects and their situation have been gradually improving since the year 1793!

There has been at different times a great deal of dispute about virtual representation. Sir, I am no great advocate for these nice  
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subtilities and special pleadings on the constitution ; much depends upon appearance as well as reality. I know well that a popular body of 558 gentlemen, if truly independent of the Crown, would be a strong barrier to the people ; but the House of Commons should not only be, but appear to be, the representative of the people : the system should satisfy the prejudices and the pride, as well as the reason of the people ; and you never can expect to give the just impression which a House of Commons ought to make on the people, until you derive it unequivocally from them. It is asked, why gentlemen who were against a parliamentary reform on former occasions should vote for it now ? Ten years ago men might reasonably object to any reform of the system, who ought now, in my opinion, to be governed by motives that are irresistible in its favour. They might look back with something like satisfaction and triumph to former Parliaments, and console themselves with the reflection, that though in moments of an ordinary kind, in the common course of human events, Parliament might abate from its vigilance, and give a greater degree of confidence than was strictly conformable with representative duty—yet there was a point beyond which no artifice of power, no influence of corruption, could carry them ; that there were barriers in the British constitution over which the House of Commons never would leap, and that the moment of danger and alarm would be the signal for the return of Parliament to its post. Such might have been the reasoning of gentlemen on the experience of former Parliaments, and with this rooted trust in the latent efficacy of Parliament, they might have objected to any attempt that should give scope to views, or cherish hopes of a change in the system itself ; but what will the same gentlemen say after the experience of the last and the present Parliament ? What dependence, what trust, what reliance, can they have for any one vestige of the constitution that is yet left to us ? Or rather, what privilege, what right, what security, has not been already violated ?

“ —quid intactum nefasti liquimus ? ”

And seeing that in no one instance have they hesitated to go the full length of every outrage that was conceived by the Minister—that they have been touched by no scruples—deterred by no sense of duty—corrected by no experience of calamity—checked by no admonition or remonstrance—that they have never made out a single case of inquiry—that they have never interposed a single restraint upon abuse, may not gentlemen consistently feel that the reform which they previously thought unnecessary is now indispensable ? We have heard to-day, Sir, all the old arguments about honour on the one side being as likely as honour on the other ; and that there are good men on both sides of the House ;  
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that a man may be a member for a close borough upon the one side of the House as well as upon the other; and that he may be a good man, fit where he may:—all this, Sir, is very idle language; it is not the question at issue. No man disputes the existence of private and individual integrity; but, Sir, this is not representation: if a man comes here as the proprietor of a burgage tenure, he does not come here as the representative of the people. The whole of this system, as it is now carried on, is as outrageous to morality, as it is pernicious to just government; it gives a scandal to our character, which not merely degrades the House of Commons in the eyes of the people, but it does more, it undermines the very principles of integrity in their hearts, and gives a fashion to dishonesty and imposture. They hear of a person giving or receiving four or five thousand pounds as the purchase-money of a seat for a close borough; and they hear the very man, who received and put into his pocket the money, make a loud, a vehement speech in this House against bribery; and they see him, perhaps, move for the commitment to prison of a poor, unfortunate wretch at your bar, who has been convicted in taking a single guinea for his vote in the very borough perhaps where he had publicly and unblushingly sold his influence, though that miserable guinea was necessary to save a family from starving, under the horrors of a war which he had contributed to bring upon the country! Sir, these are things that paralyse you to the heart; these are the things that vitiate the whole system, that spread degeneracy, hypocrisy, and sordid fraud, over the country, and take from us the energies of virtue, and sap the foundations of patriotism and spirit. The system that encourages so much vice ought to be put an end to; and it is no argument that, because it lasted a long time without mischief, it ought now to be continued, when it is found to be pernicious; it is arisen to a height that defeats the very end of government; it must sink under its own weakness. And this, Sir, is not a case peculiar to itself, but is inseparable from all human institutions. All the writers of eminence upon forms of governments have said, that, in order to preserve them, frequent recurrence must be had to their original principle. This is the opinion of Montesquieu as well as of Machiavel. Gentlemen will not be inclined to dispute the authority of the latter on this point at least; and he says, that without this recurrence they grow out of shape, and deviate from their general form. It is only by recurring to former principles that any government can be kept pure and unabused. But, say gentlemen, if any abuses have crept into our system, have we not a corrective, whose efficacy has been proved, and of which every body approves? Have we not Mr. Grenville's bill as an amendment to the constitution? An amendment it is; an amendment which acknowledges the deficiency. It is an avowal of a defective practice. It is a strong



strong argument for a reform, because it would not be necessary if the plan of representation were sufficient. But, Sir, there is a lumping consideration, if I may be allowed the phrase, which now more than ever ought to make every man a convert to parliamentary reform ; there is an annual revenue of twenty-three millions sterling collected by the executive government from the people. Here, Sir, is the despot of election ; here is the new power that has grown up to magnitude ; that bears down before it every defensive barrier established by our ancestors for the protection of the people. They had no such tyrant to control, they had no such enemy to oppose. Against every thing which was known, against every thing that was seen, they did provide ; but it did not enter into the contemplation of those who established the checks and barriers of our system, that they would ever have to stand against a revenue of twenty-three millions a year. The whole landed rental of the kingdom is not estimated at more than twenty-five millions a year, and this rental is divided and dispersed over a large body, who cannot be supposed to act in concert, or to give to their power the force of combination and unity ; but even if all united, organized, and exerted, has it not now to oppose a power nearly equal to itself in one hand, in a hand that has all the means of hostility prepared, and all the resources for action in full activity ? But it is said, that though the Government is in the receipt of a revenue of twenty-three millions a year, it has not the expenditure of that sum, and that its influence ought not to be calculated from what it receives, but what it has to pay away. I submit, however, to the good sense and to the personal experience of gentlemen who hear me, if it be not a manifest truth that influence depends almost as much upon what they have to receive, as upon what they have to pay ; whether it does not proceed as much from the submission of the dependant who has a debt to pay, as on the gratitude of the person whose attachment they reward ? And if this be true, in the influence which individuals derive from the rentals of their estates, and from the expenditure of that rental, how much more so is it true of Government, who, both in the receipt and expenditure of this enormous revenue, are actuated by one invariable principle, that of extending or withholding favour in exact proportion to the submission or resistance to their measures which the individuals make ? Compare this revenue then with that against which our ancestors were so anxious to protect us, and compare this revenue with all the bulwarks of our constitution in preceding times, and you must acknowledge, that though those bulwarks were sufficient to protect us in the days of King William and Queen Anne, they are not equal to the enemy we have now to resist. But it is said, What will this reform for us ? will it be a talisman sufficient to retrieve all the misfortunes which we have incurred ? I am free to say, that it would not  
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be sufficient unless it led to reforms of substantial expense, and to reform of all the abuses that have crept into our government. But at the same time I think it would do this, I think it would give us the chance, as I said before, of recovery. It would give us, in the first place, a Parliament vigilant and scrupulous, and that would insure to us a government active and economical. It would prepare the way for every rational improvement, of which, without disturbing the parts, our constitution is susceptible. It would do more: it would open the way for exertions infinitely more extensive than all that we have hitherto made. The Right Honourable Gentleman says that we have made exertions. True:—but what are they in comparison to our necessity? and yet they have sunk us into decrepitude, and threaten us with convulsion. I wish you to be restored to a vigour that shall make you equal to your emergency. But the Right Honourable Gentleman says that, when we consider our comparative situation with that of countries who have taken another line of conduct in the present state of the world, we ought to rejoice; and that our situation is infinitely superior to those who have not pursued the same route. I confess, Sir, that I am very much at a loss to conceive what country the Right Honourable Gentleman has in view in this comparison. Does he mean to assert that the nations who preferred the line of neutrality to that of war have fallen into a severer calamity than ourselves, and the other powers who have embraced the politics of the Right Honourable Gentleman? Does he mean to say, that Sweden, or that Denmark, has suffered more by observing an imprudent neutrality, than England or Austria by wisely plunging themselves into a war? Or does he mean to insinuate that Prussia has been the victim of its impolicy, in getting out of the conflict on the first occasion? If this be the interpretation of the Right Honourable Gentleman's argument, I do not believe that he will get many persons to subscribe to the justice of his comparison.—But probably he alludes to the fate of Holland: if this be the object to which he wishes to turn our eyes, he does it unjustly. Holland acted under the despotic mandate of that Right Honourable Gentleman; and Holland, whatever she has suffered—whatever may be her present situation—lays her calamities to the charge of England. I cannot, then, admit of the argument, that our situation is comparatively better than that of the nations who altogether kept out of the war, or, being drawn into it in the first instance, corrected their error, and restored to themselves the blessings of peace.

I have detained you, Sir, thus long in replying to the arguments which have been advanced at different times against the reform of Parliament as a general measure of policy. I come now to consider the specific proposition of my Honourable Friend, and the arguments that have been brought against it in particular. Let  
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me premise, that however averse gentlemen may be to any specific proposition of reform, if they are friendly to the principle, they ought to vote for the present question, because it is merely a motion for leave to bring in a bill which would be printed in order to give time for deliberate discussion. An opposition to such a motion comes with a very ill grace from the Right Honourable Gentleman; it contradicts his own conduct, it contradicts the policy for which he strenuously argued. In the year 1785 he moved for leave to bring in a bill on a specific plan, and he fairly called for the support of all those who approved of the principle of reform, whatever might be the latitude of their ideas on the subject; whether they wished for more or less than his proposition, he thought that they should agree to the introduction of the bill, that it might be freely discussed in the committee, in hopes that the united wisdom of the House might shape out something that would be generally acceptable. Upon this candid argument I, for one, acted. I did not approve of his specific proposition, and yet I voted with him for leave to bring in the bill. And this, Sir, has generally happened to me on all the former occasions, when propositions have been made. Though I have constantly been a friend to the principle, I have never before seen a specific plan that had my cordial approbation. That which came nearest, and of which I the least disapproved, was the plan of an Honourable Gentleman who is now no more (Mr. Flood): he was the first person who suggested the idea of extending what might be proper to add to representation, to house-keepers, as to a description of persons the best calculated to give efficacy to the representative system. My Honourable Friend's plan, built upon this idea, is an improvement of it, since it is not an attempt even to vary the form and outline, much less to new-model the representation of the people; it keeps every thing in its place; it neither varies the number, nor changes the name, nor diverts the course of any part of our system; it corrects without change; it extends without destruction of any established right; it restores simply what has been injured by abuse, and reinstates what time has mouldered away; no man can have a right to complain of genuine property assailed; no habit even; no mode of thinking, no prejudice, will be wounded; it traces back the path of the constitution from which we have wandered, but it runs out into no new direction. A noble Lord says, that the county representation must be good, that it must be approved of; be it so: this proposes to leave the county representation where it is; I wish so to leave it. I think that representation ought to be of a compound nature. The counties may be considered as territorial representation, as contradistinguished from popular; but, in order to embrace all that I think necessary, I certainly would not approve of any further extension of this branch of the representation. It has been asked, whether

the rights of corporations ought not to be maintained? that is a matter for further discussion; I have no hesitation in saying, my opinion leads the other way; but if it should be thought so, it may be so modified in the bill. There is no reasonable objection to its introduction on account of our not now agreeing with all its parts. My Honourable Friend, with all his abilities, and all the industry with which he has digested his proposition, does not presume to offer it to you as a perfect plan, nor call upon you to subscribe to it with implicit faith. He does not call upon you to adopt all his notions, nor does he think that every part of his plan will be found to quadrate with the abstract principles of representation; he looks to what is practicable in the condition in which we are placed, not to what a new people might be tempted to hazard. My opinion, however unimportant it may be, goes with the Honourable Gentleman. I think that there is enough of enterprise and vigour in the plan to restore us to health, and not enough to run us into disorder. I agree with him, because I am firmly of opinion with all the philosophical writers on the subject, that when a country is sunk into a situation of apathy and abuse, it can only be recovered by recurring to its first principles.

Now, Sir, I think that acting on this footing, to extend the right of election to housekeepers, is the best and most adviseable plan of reform; I think also, that it is the most perfect recurrence to first principles; I do not mean to the first principles of society, nor the abstract principles of representation, but to the first known and recorded principles of our constitution. According to the early history of England, and the highest authorities on our parliamentary constitution, I find this to be the case. It is the opinion of the celebrated Glanville, that in all cases where no particular right intervenes, the common law right of paying scot and lot was the right of election in the land; this, Sir, was the opinion of Sergeant Glanville, and of one of the most celebrated committees of which our parliamentary history has to boast, and this, in my opinion, is the safest line of conduct you can adopt. But it is said, that extending the right of voting to housekeepers may, in some respects, be compared to universal suffrage. I have always deprecated universal suffrage, not so much on account of the confusion to which it would lead, as because I think that we should in reality lose the very object which we desire to obtain; because I think it would in its nature embarrass and prevent the deliberative voice of the country from being heard. I do not think that you augment and multiply the deliberative body of the people by counting all the heads, but that in truth you confer on individuals, by this means, the power of drawing forth numbers, who, without deliberation, would implicitly act upon their will. My opinion is, that the best plan of representation is that which shall bring into activity the greatest number of independent voters,  
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and that that is defective which would bring forth those whose situation and condition takes from them the power of deliberation. I can have no conception of that being a good plan of election which should enable individuals to bring regiments to the poll. I hope gentlemen will not smile if I endeavour to illustrate my position by referring to the example of the other sex. In all the theories and projects of the most absurd speculation, it has never been suggested that it would be advisable to extend the elective suffrage to the female sex, and yet, justly respecting, as we must do, the mental powers, the acquirements, the discrimination, and the talents of the women of England, in the present improved state of society—knowing the opportunities which they have for acquiring knowledge—that they have interests as dear and as important as our own, it must be the genuine feeling of every gentleman who hears me, that all the superior classes of the female sex of England must be more capable of exercising the elective suffrage with deliberation and propriety than the uninformed individuals of the lowest class of men to whom the advocates of universal suffrage would extend it; and yet, why has it never been imagined that the right of election should be extended to women? Why, but because by the law of nations, and perhaps also by the law of nature, that sex is dependent on our's; and because, therefore, their voices would be governed by the relation in which they stand in society? Therefore it is, Sir, that with the exceptions of companies, in which the right of voting merely affects property, it has never been in the contemplation of the most absurd theorists to extend the elective franchise to the sex. The desideratum to be obtained, is independent voters, and that, I say, would be a defective system that should bring regiments of soldiers, of servants, and of persons whose low condition necessarily curbed the independence of their minds. That then I take to be the most perfect system which shall include the greatest quantity of independent electors, and exclude the greatest number of those who are necessarily by their condition dependent. I think that the plan of my Honourable Friend draws this line as discreetly as it can be drawn, and it by no means approaches to universal suffrage. It would neither admit, except in particular instances, soldiers nor servants. Universal suffrage would extend the right to three millions of men, but there are not more than seven hundred thousand houses that would come within the plan of my Honourable Friend; and when it is considered that out of these some are the property of minors, and that some persons have two or more houses, it would fix the number of voters for Great Britain at six hundred thousand; and I call upon gentlemen to say, whether this would not be sufficiently extensive for deliberation on the one hand, and yet sufficiently limited for order on the other. This has no similarity with universal suffrage, and yet, taking the number of represent-

atives as they now stand, it would give to every member about fifteen hundred constituents. But it is said, Would even this plan of reform protect us against the consequences of bribery and corruption? I do not affect to say that it would; I do not believe that in the present state of society we can be altogether free from this evil; no laws will be found sufficient to eradicate an evil, which example has so banefully established. We have for a course of years inculcated and habituated the people to the fordid vice, and we certainly cannot wonder that a poor man should not scruple to take five guineas for his vote, when he knows that the noble Lord in his neighbourhood took four or five thousand. But, it is to be hoped, that when this baneful encouragement is removed, the regulations that would be introduced would tend to diminish, if not altogether remove, the evil. Among those regulations, that of shortening the duration of Parliaments would be one strong corrective, and this, I think, might be done with great convenience and facility by the plan upon which the elections would be made.

It has often been a question, both within and without these walls, how far representatives ought to be bound by the instructions of their constituents. It is a question upon which my mind is not altogether made up, though I own I lean to the opinion, that having to legislate for the empire, they ought not to be altogether guided by instructions that may be dictated by local interests. I cannot, however, approve of the very ungracious manner in which I sometimes hear expressions of contempt for the opinion of constituents; they are made with a very bad grace in the first session of a septennial Parliament, particularly if they should come from individuals, who in the concluding session of a former Parliament did not scruple to court the favour of the very same constituents, by declaring that they voted against their conscience in compliance with their desire, as was the case of an Honourable Alderman of the city of London. But, Sir, there is one class of constituents whose instructions it is considered as the implicit duty of members to obey. When gentlemen represent populous towns and cities, then it is disputable whether they ought to obey their voice, or follow the dictates of their own conscience; but if they represent a noble Lord, or a noble Duke, then it becomes no longer a question of doubt; he is not considered as a man of honour who does not implicitly obey the orders of his single constituent. He is to have no conscience, no liberty, no discretion of his own; he is sent here by my Lord this, or the Duke of that, and if he does not obey the instructions he receives, he is not to be considered as a man of honour and a gentleman. Such is the mode of reasoning that prevails in this House. Is this fair? Is there any reciprocity in this conduct? Is a gentleman to be permitted, without dishonour, to act in opposition to the sentiments  
of



of the city of London, of the city of Westminster, or of Bristol; but if he dares to disagree with the Duke, or Lord, or Baronet, whose representative he is, that he must be considered as unfit for the society of men of honour?

This, Sir, is the chicane and tyranny of corruption; and this, at the same time, is called representation. In a very great degree the county members are held in the same sort of thralldom. A number of Peers possess an overweening interest in the county, and a gentleman is no longer permitted to hold his situation than as he acts agreeably to the dictates of those powerful families. Let us see how the whole of this stream of corruption has been diverted from the side of the people to that of the crown;—with what a constant, persevering art, every man who is possessed of influence in counties, corporations, or boroughs, that will yield to the solicitations of the court, is drawn over to that phalanx which is opposed to the small remnant of popular election. I have looked, Sir, to the machinations of the present Minister in that way, and I find that, including the number of additional titles, the Right Honourable Gentleman has made no fewer than one hundred and fifteen peers in the course of his administration; that is to say, he has bestowed no fewer than one hundred and fifteen titles, including new creations and elevations from one rank to another! How many of these are to be ascribed to national services, and how many to parliamentary interest, I leave the House to inquire. The country is not blind to these arts of influence, and it is impossible that we can expect them to continue to endure them.

A noble Lord has quoted a most able book on the subject of the French revolution, the work of Mr. Mackintosh, and I rejoice to see that gentlemen begin now to acknowledge the merits of that eminent writer, and that the impression that it made upon me at the time is now felt and acknowledged even by those persons who disputed its authority. The noble Lord (Hawkesbury) has quoted Mr. Mackintosh's book on account of the observation which he made on the article which relates to the French elections: he thought that their plan would lead to the evil of universal suffrage. I have not forgot the sarcasms that were flung out on my approbation of this celebrated work; that I was told of "my new library, stuffed with the jargon of the Rights of Man:" it now appears, however, that I did not greatly overrate this performance, and they now quote Mr. Mackintosh as an authority, who before treated him with splenetic scorn. Now, Sir, with all my sincere admiration of this book, I think the weakest and most objectionable passage in it, is that which the noble Lord has quoted; I think it is that which the learned author would himself be the most desirous to correct. Without descending to minute and equivocal theories, and without inquiring

quiring further into the rights of man than what is necessary to our purpose, there is one position in which we shall all agree, that man has the right to be well governed. Now, it is obvious, that no people can be satisfied with a government from the constituent parts of which they are excluded. When we look to the kingdom of Scotland, we see a state of representation so monstrous and absurd, so ridiculous and revolting, that it is good for nothing, except, perhaps, to be placed by the side of the English, in order to set off our defective system, by the comparison of one still more defective. In Scotland there is no shadow even of representation, there is neither a representation of property for the counties, nor of population for the towns. It is not what we understand in England by freeholders, that elect in the counties; the right is vested in what is called the superiorities, and it might so happen that all the members for the counties of Scotland might come here without having the vote of a single person who had a foot of property in the land.—This is an extreme case, but it is within the limits of their system. In the boroughs their magistrates are self-elected, and therefore the members have nothing to do with the population of the towns.

Now, Sir, having shewn this to be the state of the country and the state of our representation, I ask you what remedy there can be other than reform? What can we expect, as the necessary result of a system so defective and vicious in all its parts, but increased and increasing calamities, until we shall be driven to a convulsion that would overthrow every thing? If we do not apply this remedy in time, our fate is inevitable.—Our most illustrious patriots, and the men whose memories are the dearest to Englishmen, have long ago pointed out to us parliamentary reform as the only means of redressing national grievance. I need not inform you, that Sir George Saville was its most strenuous advocate; I need not tell you that the venerable and illustrious Camden was through life a steady adviser of seasonable reform; nay, Sir, to a certain degree we have the authority of Mr. Burke himself for the propriety of correcting the abuses of our system; for gentlemen will remember the memorable answer that he gave to the argument that was used for our right of taxing America, on the score of their being virtually represented; and that they were in the same situation as Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield—“What!” said Mr. Burke, “when the people of America look up to you with the eyes of filial love and affection, will you turn to them the *shameful* parts of the constitution?” With, then, the concurring testimony of so many authorities for correcting our abuses, why do we hesitate? Can we do any harm by experiment? Can we possibly put ourselves into a worse condition than we are? What advantages we shall gain I know not; I think we shall gain many; I think we shall gain at least the chance



chance of warding off the evil of confusion, growing out of accumulated discontent ; I think that we shall save ourselves from the evil that has fallen upon Ireland ; I think that we shall satisfy the moderate, and take even from the violent, if any such there be, the power of increasing their numbers, and of making converts to their schemes. This, Sir, is my solemn opinion, and upon this ground it is that I recommend with earnestness and solicitude the proposition of my Honourable Friend.

And now, Sir, before I sit down, allow me to make a single observation with respect to the character and conduct of those who have, in conjunction with myself, felt it their duty to oppose the progress of this disastrous war. I hear it said, " You do nothing but mischief when you are here, and yet we should be sorry to see you away." I do not know how we shall be able to satisfy the gentlemen who feel towards us in this way ; if we can neither do our duty without mischief, nor please them with doing nothing, I know but of one way by which we can give them content, and that is by putting an end to our existence. With respect to myself, and I believe I can also speak for others, I do not feel it consistent with my duty totally to secede from this House. I have no such intention ; but, Sir, I have no hesitation in saying, that after seeing the conduct of this House, after seeing them give to Ministers their confidence and support, upon convicted failure, imposition, and incapacity ; after seeing them deaf and blind to the consequences of a career that penetrates the hearts of all other men with alarm, and that neither reason, experience, nor duty, are sufficiently powerful to influence them to oppose the conduct of Government, I certainly do think that I may devote more of my time to my private pursuits, and to the retirement which I love, than I have hitherto done ; I certainly think I need not devote much of it to fruitless exertions, and to idle talk, in this House. Whenever it shall appear that my efforts may contribute in any degree to restore us to the situation from which the confidence of this House in a desperate system, and an incapable Administration, has so suddenly reduced us, I shall be found ready to discharge my duty.

Sir, I have done ; I have given my advice. I propose the remedy, and fatal will it be for England if pride and prejudice much longer continue to oppose it.—The remedy which is proposed is simple, easy, and practicable ; it does not touch the vitals of the constitution ; and I sincerely believe it will restore us to peace and harmony. Do you think that you must not come to parliamentary reform soon, and is it not better to come to it now when you have the power of deliberation, than when perhaps it may be extorted from you by convulsion ? There is as yet time to frame it with freedom and discussion ; it will even yet go to the people with the grace and favour of a spontaneous act.

What will it be when it is extorted from you with indignation and violence? God forbid that this should be the case, but now is the moment to prevent it; and now, I say, wisdom and policy recommend it to you, when you may enter into all the considerations to which it leads, rather than to postpone it to a time when you will have nothing to consider but the number and the force of those who demand it. It is asked, whether liberty has not gained much of late years, and whether the popular branch ought not, therefore, to be content? To this I answer, that if liberty has gained much, power has gained more. Power has been indefatigable and unwearied in its encroachments; every thing has run in that direction through the whole course of the present reign. This was the opinion of Sir George Saville, of the Marquis of Rockingham, and of all the virtuous men who in their public life proved themselves to be advocates for the rights of the people. They saw and deplored the tendency of the court; they saw that there was a determined spirit in the secret advisers of the crown to advance its power, and to encourage no administration that should not bend itself to that pursuit. Accordingly through the whole reign no administration who cherished notions of a different kind has been permitted to last, and nothing, therefore, or next to nothing, has been gained to the side of the people, but every thing to the crown in the course of the reign. During the whole of this period we have had no more than three administrations, one for twelve months, one for nine, and one for three months, that acted upon the popular principles of the early part of this century: nothing, therefore, I say, has been gained to the people, while the constant current has run towards the crown, and God knows what is to be the consequence, both to the crown and country. I believe that we are come to the last moment of possible remedy. I believe that at this moment the enemies of both are few; but I firmly believe that what has been seen in Ireland, will be experienced also here, and that if we are to go on in the same career with convention bills and acts of exasperation of all kinds, the few will soon become the many, and that we shall have to pay a severe retribution for our present pride. What a noble Lord said some time ago of France, may be applicable to this very subject—"What!" said he, "negotiate with France? With men whose hands are reeking with the blood of their sovereign? What! shall we degrade ourselves by going to Paris, and there asking in humble, diplomatic language, *to be on a good understanding with them?*" Gentlemen will remember these lofty words, and yet we have come to this humiliation, we have negotiated with France, and I should not be surprised to see the noble Lord himself (Hawkesbury) going to Paris, not at the head of his regiment, but on a diplomatic commission to those very regicides, to pray to be upon a  
good



good understanding with them.—Shall we then be blind to the lessons which the events of the world exhibit to our view? Pride, obstinacy, and insult, must end in concessions, and those concessions must be humble in proportion to our unbecoming pride. Now is the moment to prevent all these degradations; the Monarchy, the Aristocracy, the People themselves, may now be saved; it is only necessary, at this moment, to conquer our own passions. Let those Ministers, whose evil genius has brought us to our present condition, retire from the post to which they are unequal. I have no hesitation in saying, that the present Administration neither can nor ought to remain in place; let them retire from his Majesty's councils, and then let us, with an earnest desire of recovering the country, pursue this moderate scheme of reform, under the auspices of men who are likely to conciliate the opinion of the people. I do not speak this, Sir, from personal ambition. A new Administration ought to be formed: I have no desire, no wish, of making a part of any such Administration; and I am sure that such an arrangement is feasible, and that it is capable of being done without me. My first and chief desire is to see this great end accomplished; I have no desire to be the person, or to be one of the persons, to do it; but though my wish is for retirement, I shall always be ready to give my free and firm support to any Administration that shall restore to the country its outraged rights, and re-establish its strength upon the basis of free representation; and therefore, Sir, I shall certainly give my vote for the proposition of my Honourable Friend.

The House divided,

Ayes, including tellers,	93
Noes — — —	258

The following is a List of the Minority on this important question :

Anson Thos.	Jervoise C. J.
Aubrey Sir J.	Knight R. P.
Baker Wm. (County)	Lemon Sir Wm. (County)
Bamfylde Sir C. W.	Lemon J.
Barclay G.	Milbanke R. (County)
Baring J.	Milner Sir Wm.
Bastard J. P. (County)	Nicholls J.
Beauclerk Chas.	North D.

E

Bid.

Biddulph R.	(County)	Northey Wm.
Bird W. W.		Phillips J. G.
Bouverie Hon. E.		Pierse H.
Brogden Jas.		Pollen G. A.
Burch J. R.		Plumer Wm. (County)
Burdett Sir F.		Rawdon Hon. J.
Byng G. .	(County)	Rawdon Hon. G.
Cavendish Lord G.	(County)	Richardson Jos.
Coke T. W.	(County)	Robson R. B.
Coke Edw.		Ruffell Lord J.
Colhoun Wm.		Ruffell Lord W. (County)
Combe H. C.	(London)	St. John Hon. St. A. (County)
Copley Sir L.		Sheridan R. B.
Courtenay J.		Shum G.
Crewe J.	(County)	Smith W.
Curwen J. C.		Spencer Lord R.
Clarke Edw.		Stanley Lord
Davers Sir C.		Stein John
Dennison Jos.		Sturt Chas.
Dimfdale Baron		Taylor M. A.
Dolben Sir Wm.		Thornton Henry
Dundas Chas.	(County)	Tierney G.
Dundas Hon. Law.		Townshend Lord J.
Erskine Hon. Thos.		Trevanion John
Fitzpatrick General		Tufton Hon. J.
Fletcher Sir H.	(County)	Tufton Hon. H.
Folkes Sir M. B.		Turner Sir Chas.
Fox Rt. Hon. C. J.		Vanfittart G. (County)
Greene Jas.		Vyner R. (County)
Grey Charles	(County)	Walpole G.
Hare J.		Walwyn Jas.
Harrison J.		Western C. C.
Heathcote Sir G.	(County)	Whitbread S.
Hill Sir Rich.	(County)	Wigley Ed.
Hobhouse B.		Wilkins W. (County)
Howard Hen.		Williams Thomas
Huffey Wm.		Williams Owen
Jefferys N.		Wilson R.
Jekyll J.		

Smith Wm.

TELLERS,

Sheridan R. B.



The following Members were absent:

We have Mr. MARTIN'S (Member for Tewkesbury) authority for saying that, had not the division taken place at so late an hour, his name would have appeared in the Minority, as Mr. Grey's proposition had his warmest concurrence.

General Tarleton was absent through a severe domestic calamity.

Thomas Thompson, Esq. ill health.

R. S. Milnes, Esq. ditto.

W. H. Lambton, Esq. abroad.

Earl Wycombe, ditto.

John Scudamore, Esq. absent on the service of his country.

FINIS.

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